

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L REYKJAVIK 0322

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MILI

SUBJECT: REMOVAL OF C-121S: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

REF: STATE 060680

1. SUMMARY: UNLESS A SUBSTITUTE, WHETHER GROUND STATION OR OTHER AIR MEANS, IS MADE AVAILABLE THAT WILL PROVIDE THE RADAR COVERAGE OF THE C-121S, OR UNLESS WE CAN CONVINCE PRESENT LEADERSHIP OF ICELAND THAT LOSS OF RADAR COVERAGE CURRENTLY PROVIDED BY THE C-121S WILL NOT DEGRADE DEFENSE OF ICELAND (RPT. DEFENSE OF ICELAND), WE WILL (RPT. WILL) INDEED HAVE SOME SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MIN GEIR HALLGRIMSSON HAD MADE IT CLEAR TO ME SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE PAST TWO YEARS THAT SUPPORT WITHIN HIS INDEPENDENCE PARTY FOR RETENTION IDF RESTED AS MUCH ON THE IDF PROVIDING "MAXIMUM AND POSITIVE" DEFENSE OF ICELAND AS ON RELATIVE DEFENSE OF ICELAND WITHIN A NATO CONTEXT. HE MADE THIS POINT ALSO TO UNDER SEC SICO AND CNO HOLLOWAY DURING THEIR VISIT HERE A FEW MONTHS AGO. STATED MORE BLUNTLY, AS HALLGRIMSSON HAS DONE TO ME IN PRIVATE SEVERAL TIMES, WHEN USG STARTS SHOWING SIGNS THAT COMPOSITION AND SIZE OF IDF ARE BASED ON UNILATERAL USG CONSIDERATIONS WITHOUT REGARD TO EFFECT ON DEFENSE OF ICELAND PER SE, WE CAN EXPECT THE RAPID EROSION OF SUPPORT FOR
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IDF RETENTION WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AND IN THE PARLIAMENT.

HALLGRIMSSON IS PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO VULNERABILITY OF ICELAND BY AIR, HENCE HIS STRONG POSITION ON THE F-4S. WE CAN EXPECT THE SAME SENSITIVITY REGARDING REDUCED RADAR COVERAGE.

3. ABOUT TEN DAYS AGO IN A CONVERSATION I HAD WITH THE PRIME MINISTER OVER A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS, HE REMARKED THAT THERE WERE STILL SOME SERIOUS IRRITATIONS BETWEEN HIS INDEPENDENCE PARTY AND HIS PROGRESSIVE PARTY COALITION PARTNERS CONCERNING THE NEW DEFENSE ARRANGEMENTS SIGNED LAST OCTOBER. HE SAID THAT THE PP STILL BELIEVES THAT THE IDF COULD HAVE BEEN REDUCED MORE THAN 420 MILITARY PERSONNEL WITHOUT ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE DEFENSE OF ICELAND. THE IP POSITION WAS THAT A CUT OF EVEN 420 WAS "TAKING A RISK," BUT AGREED TO THIS FIGURE FOR COALITION HARMONY AND ON THE WORD OF THE USG THAT THE RISK WAS TOLERABLE. THE PRIME MINISTER REMARKED THAT IF ANY ACTION ON OUR PART PROVED THE PP TO BE RIGHT, IT WOULD CAUSE CONSIDERABLE EMBARRASSMENT TO HIM, HIS INDEPENDENCE PARTY, AND HARM TO THE STABILITY OF THE PRESENT COALITION, WITH REPERCUSSIONS FELT IN OUR DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP. HE ALSO REMARKED THAT THE COALITION WAS UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM THE OPPOSITION AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC BECAUSE OF THE DETERIORATING ECONOMY IN ICELAND AND IT COULD NOT STAND A RUPTURE WITHIN ITS RANKS, WHICH THE DEFENSE ISSUE COULD BRING ABOUT. I REPLIED I KNEW OF NO CAUSE OR REASON FOR APPREHENSION ON HIS PART.

4. LAST YEAR BETWEEN APRIL (WHEN THE PREVIOUS GOVT. PRESENTED ITS DEFENSE PROPOSALS TO USG) AND THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS (IN JUNE) THERE WAS MUCH PUBLIC AND POLITICAL PARTY CONTROVERSY OVER WHETHER THE AEW C-121S AND THE F-4S WERE REALLY NEEDED FOR THE DEFENSE OF ICELAND. THE PRO-IDF PRESS HAD PAGES OF GRAPICS SHOWING ICELAND'S VULNERABILITY TO AIR ATTACK WITHOUT THE C-121S, POINTING OUT THAT THESE FILLED THE GAP IN RADAR COVERAGE IN THE ABSENCE OF GROUND STATIONS. BY THE TIME COALITION FORMATION DISCUSSIONS WERE TAKING PLACE IN AUGUST, THE PP AND OTHERS WERE CONCEDING THAT FULL FIGHTER PROTECTION

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(INCLUDING THE AEW C-121S) COULD NOT BE DISPENSED WITH.

5. LAST FALL I WAS UNDER THE IMPRESSION THAT THE AIR FORCE WAS CONTEMPLATING REPLACEMENT OF THE C-121S WITH A MORE MODERN VERSION. IN DECEMBER THE AIR FORCE NOTIFIED THE IDF THAT IT WAS CONTEMPLATING FULL DEACTIVATION, WITHOUT REPLACEMENT, BY THE FORTH QUARTER OF FY 1976. ALSO THAT THE PHASEDOWN WOULD START DURING THE FOURTH

QUARTER OF FY 1975 WITH A 50 PER CENT REDUCTION. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THE IDF HAS MADE RECLAMERS BASED ON MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS. I WAS NOT AWARE THAT A FINAL DECISION ON THE BASIS HAD BEEN MADE. I THINK IT IS IMPORTANT FOR STATE TO WEIGH IN ON THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS, AT LEAST UNDER THE PRESENT UN-EASY POLITICAL SITUATION IN ICELAND. THE PRESENT COALITION, THE STABILITY OF WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR LONG-TERM RETENTION OF THE IDF, IS NOT YET ASSURED. IT WOULD BE TO THE ADVANTAGE OF DOD TO PONDER A MOMENT ABOUT THE ADVERSE RESULT THE AIR FORCE ACTION COULD CAUSE TO DOD'S GREATER INTEREST, NAMELY RETENTION OF AN UNIMPAIRED IDF.

6. USG IS COMMITTED TO ADVISE THE GOI OF ANY MAJOR CHANGES REGARDING THE IDF. DROPPING THE RADAR COVERAGE PROVIDED BY THE C-121S WOULD FALL INTO THE CATEGORY. WITH THE COALITION AS SHAKY AS IT STILL IS, NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BRING THE AIR FORCE'S CONTEMPLATED ACTION TO THE ATTENTION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ICELAND. WHAT THE POLITICAL SITUATION HERE WILL BE LIKE IN 6 TO 9 MONTHS IS ANYBODY'S GUESS. I WOULD SUGGEST A POST-PONEMENT OF A FINAL DECISION FOR AT LEAST 6 MONTHS AND MAKE ANOTHER POLITICAL ASSESSMENT AT THAT TIME.
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